

## THE ADVENT.

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The spirit of unbelief invariably stumbles over the doctrine of the incarnation. "How can I accept such dogma as this," says the skeptic, "it is confessedly so mysterious that I cannot understand it, and hence I am not bound to believe it." There is, in this objection, a blending of truth and error, and the measure of truth is just sufficient to cast the shade of plausibility over the error with which it is associated. The fact, however, of the coming of the Christ, as God veiled in flesh, is plainly and simply stated in the Divine Word; it is distinctly taught throughout the scriptures, is everywhere consonant with reason, and comes supported by evidences entirely convincing. So that in urging this great doctrine of our Holy Christianity, we appeal not to credulity but to reason.

There can be no difficulty in proving that the Divine Mind determined on the advent of Christ in the counsels of eternity. We are liable to mistake with reference to the acts and operations of God, viewing them as if they were performed by limited and imperfect beings like ourselves. We are so constituted that we can not think nor speak of events except as occurring in a certain natural order of succession, which we call time. Hence we are in danger of attempting to measure the character of God by the impaired standard of our own narrow and circumscribed faculties. But we should recollect that the knowledge of the Divine Being is absolute in its nature and infinite as to its extent. The past—the period stretching throughout the immeasurable ages of eternity ago; the present, with its complexity of act and operation; the future, traversing the ages and cycles of ages of that eternity which has yet to come—these, all these lie spread before the Omniscient eye as one "great eternal now." Whatever God does in purpose and design he does from eternity. For him to change his mind, or in any way alter his determination, is a natural impossibility. As infinitely perfect he is incapable of change. His Word has gone forth: "I am the Lord I change not." His design in sending his own Son into the world was not, as some suppose, a mere expedient nor device to remedy an unlooked for calamity which had been brought about under the Divine government; on the contrary, it was a great moral fact, to which the Almighty Father turned his eye from eternity; a fact, also, which constituted a grand central point in the dispen-

sations of Providence and the administration of grace. The advent of the Christ, then, was not a mere accident nor contingency; it was a most precious arrangement which had been planned in eternity.

But the coming of the Christ was clearly predicted by the prophets. Immediately after the fall, an intimation was given to Adam that Jesus, as the seed of the woman, would bruise, by his great atoning sacrifice, the serpent's head. The same promise, in other words, was made to Abraham, when God said, "In thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed." The language of this promise transcends anything that could be ascribed to Isaac. It is in Christ only—the true spiritual seed—that it finds its full accomplishment; in Him only have all the nations of the earth been blessed. And here we are not confined merely to inference; the Apostle Paul affirms, "Now to Abraham and his seed were the promises made. He saith not, and to seeds, as of many; but as of one, and to thy seed, which is Christ."

We have another reference to the advent in the sublime prediction uttered by Baalim the son of Beor, whose eyes were opened, and who, speaking of the vision he had of the Almighty, says, "I shall see Him, but not now; I shall behold Him, but not nigh; there shall come a star out of Jacob, and a sceptre shall rise out of Israel." And this same Christ is evidently meant by Moses when he thus informs the people, "The Lord thy God will raise up unto thee a Prophet from the midst of thee, of thy brethren, like unto me: unto him shall ye hearken."

You will observe, also, that in these predictions the most minute circumstances are particularly specified. The time when the Christ should come is distinctly marked. "The sceptre shall not depart from Judah, nor a law-giver from between his feet, until Shiloh come; and unto him shall the gathering of the people be." The miraculous, immaculate conception is also announced: "Behold a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel." The place of his birth is minutely located: "But thou Bethlehem Ephratah, though thou be little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of thee shall he come forth unto me that is to be ruler in Israel: whose goings forth have been of old, from everlasting." The style and manner of his coming are graphically described: "Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion! shout, O daughter of Jerusalem: behold thy King cometh unto thee; He is just and having salvation." And the last of the Jewish prophets predicts the suddenness of the advent: "Be-

hold I will send my messenger, and he shall prepare the way before me; and the Lord whom ye seek shall suddenly come into his temple, even the messenger of the covenant whom ye delight in: behold, he shall come, saith the Lord of Hosts."

Thus it appears that the leading circumstances connected with the Saviour's coming have all been described. We shall not, in this article, proceed to show how these Old Testament prophecies have been accomplished in Jesus of Nazareth. We wish simply to exhibit the fact, that the advent has been directly referred to by the prophets; of this fact itself we have the most ample and satisfactory evidence. No doubt the children of God in Old Testament times were familiar with the scriptures in which the coming of Christ is intimated. They would constitute the ground work of their faith and hope in God. And as they looked forward to the hour when these predictions would be accomplished in the advent of the promised Messiah, a holy joy would fill their breasts, and, in an ecstasy of sacred delight they would sing, "Behold, he cometh leaping upon the mountains, skipping upon the hills."

And this coming of Christ has actually taken place in the Saviour's incarnation. We enter now upon a subject which ought to be approached with profoundest reverence. Will our God really dwell with us on the earth? What a weighty and important question! a question only to be answered in the light of the Divine Word. Listen then to the oracle already quoted, "Behold a virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel." This name signifies, according to the Apostle, "God with us." Christ is God with us, God in our nature, God manifest in the flesh. He is represented by Inspiration as declaring that a *body* was prepared for him. "Wherefore when he cometh into the world he saith, sacrifice and offering thou wouldst not, but a body hast thou prepared for me." And John declares, in language, the force and meaning of which cannot be shaken by any perversion, "The Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us." THE WORD—that magnificent person to whom he referred in the beginning of his Gospel, and concerning whom he affirms that he was from the beginning with God; that he was himself God—"the Word was God." And, as God, he created all things; for without him, it is said, was not any thing made (or, according to the more emphatic idiom of the original, without him was not *one* thing made) that was made. Now mark what John says of this wondrous Being—he "was made